

entertainment. Most preferably, advertisements, prices, drink specials, and the like can be incorporated into and with these forms of entertainment in the form of subtitles, commercial interruptions, scrolling text, or the like. Therefore, as used herein and in the appended claims, the term "advertisement" is intended to include any form of audio or visual display which can be used to inform, entice, pursued, or entertain customers in public venues and retail outlets. The beverage dispenser 10 depicted in the figures is one representative of several sizes and styles of dispensers available from SHURflo Pump Manufacturing Company of Orange, California. The present invention is not intended to be limited to the dispenser configuration shown in the figures, but rather could be practiced with any size or style beverage dispenser known or yet unknown.

The beverage dispenser 10 preferably includes a cabinet portion 14 supported by support members 18, which can take the form of wheels (as shown) or can alternatively take the form of any suitable supporting elements such as legs, sliding casters, etc. A tower 22 extends from the cabinet portion 14 and preferably includes a plurality of beverage supply nozzles 26 that dispense beverage to the containers (not shown) held below. The tower 22 can take any shape desired, such as the L shape shown in the figures. The dispenser 10 preferably also includes a beverage metering device 30 (represented schematically in FIG. 1) that tracks and records the amount of beverage dispensed through the nozzles 26. The beverage metering device 30 is conventional in nature and operation and can be of any suitable construction. For example, the beverage metering device 30 can track and record the number of individual sales and the corresponding serving sizes dispensed at each sale, and/or can track and record the total quantity of beverage dispensed. The beverage metering device 30 can also include a timing device 32 which, acting in conjunction with the metering device 30, can record the rate at which a beverage is dispensed and/or coordinate these rates with time of day, day of week, or the like. In addition, the timing device 32 can record the rate at which a beverage is dispensed while or after particular advertisements are displayed. The beverage metering device 30 can include a readout display that is located on the beverage dispenser 10, or alternatively can be linked to a readout display remote from the beverage dispenser 10. Technology capable of such tracking and recording operations is known in the beverage dispensing industry and is not therefore described in greater detail herein.

The beverage dispenser 10 also preferably includes at least one viewing device 34 adjacent thereto or mounted therein or thereon. In the illustrated preferred embodiment, two viewing devices 34 and 38 are associated with the dispenser 10. The viewing device 34 is shown coupled to an outwardly facing planar surface 42 of the tower 22 and takes the form of a flat-screen monitor or flat-screen television that can be built into the outwardly facing planar surface 42 or can be attached to the outwardly facing planar surface 42 by any suitable fastening method. The viewing device 38 is shown coupled to an upper surface 46 of the tower 22 and takes the form of a typical monitor or television set. The viewing device 38 can be rotatably coupled to the upper surface 46 to allow the viewing device 38 to be rotated for viewing from different locations with respect to the dispenser 10.

The locations of the viewing devices 34 and 38 on the dispenser 10 as shown in FIG. 1 are only two examples of the various locations and mounting orientations possible for viewing devices of the present invention. Other mounting locations and orientations are possible and fall within the spirit and scope of the present invention. For example, one or more viewing devices could be mounted at various locations on or in the cabinet portion 14. Additionally, according to the invention it is not necessary for any viewing devices to be mounted to the beverage dispenser 10 as shown in FIG. 1. Instead, the viewing devices can be located adjacent to the dispenser 10 in the retail outlet.

The viewing devices 34 and 38 can be of any construction capable of displaying a video signal, including but not limited to standard picture tube-type televisions or monitors, rear projection-type televisions or monitors, and flat-screen televisions or monitors having liquid crystal or other types of displays. Front projection-type display systems can also be used in conjunction with a screen mounted adjacent to the beverage dispenser 10. In some preferred embodiments, at least one of the viewing devices 34 and 38 includes a touch-screen feature wherein commands can be given by simply touching the appropriate area of the viewing screen. Additionally, the viewing devices 34 and 38 can be any size or shape desired to suit the needs of the retail outlet in which the beverage dispenser 10 is placed. For example, the beverage dispenser 10 illustrated in FIG. 1 is suitable for any retail outlet application, but is well-suited

for smaller retail outlets wherein long lines are not prevalent (such as in a restaurant, bar, or tavern). The viewing devices 34 and 38 can include built-in speakers that transmit an audio signal accompanying the video signal displayed by the viewing devices 34 and 38.

Alternatively or in addition, separate speakers (not shown) can be positioned adjacent to the dispenser 10 to transmit the audio signal. The dispenser 10 can employ any number of viewing devices and/or audio devices for displaying advertisements to a consumer in or near the retail outlet.

At least one output device 50 is coupled to the viewing devices 34 and 38 and can be located adjacent to or remote from the beverage dispenser 10. The output device 50 is capable of providing a signal to the viewing devices 34 and 38 and/or to the audio devices (not shown in FIG. 1) to display advertisements having at least one of a video component and an audio component, and preferably both. Preferably, the advertisements displayed are for at least one of the beverages being dispensed by the dispenser 10. In FIG. 1, the output device 50 is shown schematically located inside the cabinet portion 14 and is coupled to the viewing devices 34 and 38 via any suitable connection capable of transmitting the video and audio signals to the viewing devices 34 and 38 and audio devices. For example, cables 54 and 58 are shown schematically connecting the output device 50 to the viewing devices 34 and 38, respectively. In this embodiment, the cables 54 and 58 can preferably be routed inside the cabinet portion 14 and tower 22, and thereby kept hidden from view and substantially out of the way of customers and operators. Alternatively, the output device 50 can be located remote from the viewing devices 34 and 38 (as shown in phantom in FIG. 1) and can be coupled to the viewing devices 34 and 38 with cables 56 and 60 that run outside of the beverage dispenser 10.

The output device 50 can be any device capable of providing at least one of a video and audio signal to the viewing devices 34 and 38 and/or audio transmitting devices (i.e., speakers, headphones, etc. -- not shown). For example, the output device 50 can include a VCR, a DVD player, a cable television controller, a satellite television controller, a laser-disc player, a computer processor, or any other suitable device. If only an audio component is desired, the output device 50 can include a cassette tape player, a DAT player, a CD player, or any other suitable device. In a preferred embodiment, the output device 50 takes the form of a DVD